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221055Z Jun 04

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 005080

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STATE FOR NEA/ARN, NEA/PA, NEA/AIA, INR/NESA, R/MR,  
I/GNEA, B/BXN, B/BRN, NEA/PPD, NEA/IPA FOR ALTERMEN  
USAID/ANE/MEA  
LONDON FOR GOLDRICH  
PARIS FOR O'FRIEL

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON THE AL-QAEDA BEHEADINGS

#### Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, June 22, focuses on a local story that broke out yesterday about the discovery of leaked high-school final exam papers and the postponement of these exams as a result. The story is treated a scandal with many parliamentarians and individuals calling for the resignation of the Minister of Education. The lead story in all papers, June 21, focused on King Abdullah's telephone conversation with the Saudi Crown Prince, during which he expressed Jordan's support for the Saudi fight against terrorism, and emphasized that "terrorist attacks, whose victims are mostly civilian, have greatly harmed Muslims and their causes."

#### Representative Editorial Commentary

-- "Time to take a stand"

Centrist, influential among the elite English daily Jordan Times (06/21) editorializes: "His Majesty King Abdullah spoke on behalf of all true Muslims when he expressed shock and revolt at the savage beheading of American hostage Paul Johnson by Al-Qaeda terrorists in Riyadh.... Such tragic episodes do not only mar the image of Islam; more importantly, they raise questions as to the direction radical, fanatical Muslims lead the Muslim nation on.... if Al-Qaeda believes that it can continue to take the life of innocent people in the name of God and Islam with impunity, then the struggle against it must intensify. King Abdullah showed in the clearest possible terms where we stand on this issue. What remains to be done is the expression of a similar position by the rest of the Arab and Muslim leaders. This is no time to waiver; it is time to make a principled stand against terrorism falsely carried out in the name of religion."

#### Editorial Commentary on Terrorism

-- "The decapitators"

Daily columnist Yaqoub Jaber writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (06/22): "As if it was not enough for Al-Qaeda to defame the image of the tolerant Islam with its attacks against the United States and a number of Asian and European cities. They have created a new disgusting way of dealing with their victims, namely beheading them, thus instigating the largest level of hatred possible against Muslims.. The painful result of this provocation is the infliction of more offense against Islam and Muslim, and it is a result that the Zionists will surely use to justify their crimes in Palestine.. We in the Muslim world, who are riddled with the likes of these terrorists, must differentiate between the regular citizen of a western country, which supports Israel and occupies Iraq, and that citizen's government. There are millions of Americans who do not approve of their policies of their government and are sympathetic with the Palestinian cause and who oppose the occupation of Iraq. An important part of our battle with our enemies is dependent on winning public opinion in western countries, and that definitely cannot be achieved by beheading innocent citizens who find themselves in our countries."

-- "Prospering terrorism in Bush's era"

Daily columnist Fahd Fanek writes on the back page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (06/21): "After the attacks of 9/11, U.S. President Bush declared a war against terrorism and sent his

troops to Afghanistan and then to Iraq. So did Bush's war succeed? Did it achieve its declared objectives? Probably the opposite is correct. Local and international terrorism prospered in the Bush era and the world has become a less safe place, because Al-Qaeda is now bigger and stronger than ever before. Afghanistan has become a stage for warlords, the production and export of drugs and oppression of women.... Iraq, after the American occupation, has become a stage for terrorists of all sorts and the Iraqi people lost their security without gaining any democracy.... The terrorist activity in Saudi Arabia, which, before the Bush wars, used to express itself once every couple of years is now expressing itself on daily basis.... Pakistan, which was a stable and secure state, is now, thanks to the U.S. policy, a stage for local terrorism.... Europe did not go unscathed by these terrorist operations.... America's policies and measures did not eliminate terrorism. They rather contributed to its prosperity by, for instance: describing the war on terrorism as a crusade; bypassing international law and legitimacy; killing civilians in numbers that are much higher than the number of victims of the 9/11 attacks; overlooking Israel's terrorism against the Palestinian people; the principle of the pre-emptive war; arrogance in dealing even with the allies; the maltreatment of prisoners; the abrupt intervention in other countries' internal affairs; and the imperial ambition of trying to dominate the world."

-- "Madness faced with madness!"

Daily columnist Yaser Za'atreh writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (06/21): "I start by saying that I am providing an explanation and not a justification. Our stand vis--vis violence that harms the security of Arab and Muslim countries is very clear.... This phenomenon however requires an explanation.... This is a prelude for the story of the beheading of the first American hostage in Iraq and the second one in Saudi Arabia. These are two events that were marked by extended media coverage and large-scale condemnation in the Arab world.... It is madness without a doubt. Yet, let us wonder which is more ugly: the killing and dismemberment of tens of innocent people at a wedding in a city in Iraq or the beheading of two hostages? What is the difference between the killing of two hostages by beheading and the killing of the residents of a building in Gaza for the purpose of assassinating the martyr Salah Shihadeh? Which is more ugly: the beheading of two hostages or the killing of more than twenty people in the city of Fallujah on the pretext of pursuing terrorists? Which is more ugly: the beheading of two hostages or the releasing of vicious dogs against prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison? It is ugliness that provokes the same ugliness.... It is madness that provokes madness. What the United States is doing with Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine is the humiliation beyond which lies more, particularly when it comes to a nation founded on dignity and pride.... We said that we are explaining and not justifying, because those who are doing this are not looking for justifications. They have already gone past that and are now implementing. Unfortunately, they did not retaliate well, because there is a huge difference between retaliations that serve the enemy's objectives and those that hit it where it hurts."

GNEHM